The Journal of Asia TEFL

Inclusion of Vocabulary Learning Strategies in ELT Coursebooks

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Introduction

"Without grammar, very little can be conveyed. Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed" (Wilkins, 1972, p. 11). Although this quote was published over 45 years ago, it remains pertinent, and succinctly highlights the role of vocabulary as one of the most important components of foreign language learning. In order to successfully acquire a second or foreign language, it is accepted that the learner must master a certain amount of vocabulary (Nation, 2001). Research has indicated that certain skills or behaviours, known as vocabulary learning strategies (VLS), are strongly linked to successful vocabulary learning (Macaro, 2006). Studies show the benefits of using these strategies for vocabulary size (Gu & Johnson, 1996), and retention and overall proficiency (Fan, 2003). Furthermore, there is research evidence supporting learner training in the use of such strategies to improve vocabulary learning (Nation, 2001).

This study investigates VLS inclusion in three commercially available ELT coursebooks. Although research exists on teachers helping students acquire the VLS which help them become autonomous vocabulary learners, the role of coursebooks has not been fully explored. However, in order for students to succeed in learning vocabulary, Schmitt (2008) encourages active contributions from four learning partners: students, teachers, researchers and materials writers, all of which he considers equally important. Therefore, considering:

- classroom vocabulary instruction is not sufficient to teach all the unknown words a learner needs (Folse, 2011), and
- ELT coursebooks are widely used in language learning classrooms and strongly influence their structure and content (Littlejohn, 2011)

coursebooks seem to be an obvious place to include and practice VLS. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine:

- the extent of VLS
- the variety of VLS
- the extent of VLS practice opportunities
- the extent of independent study opportunities in the reference materials

as presented in intermediate level coursebooks in Japan.

Literature Review

VLS can be defined as activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own vocabulary language learning (Griffiths, 2013). Although there remains a lack of consensus regarding an appropriate VLS taxonomy (Takač, 2008), the classification of VLS in Figure 1 has the benefit of reflecting the different stages of vocabulary learning (discovery of a new word's meaning and consolidating the meaning), and includes metacognitive strategy use throughout the whole process of vocabulary learning. Discovery includes guessing, dictionary and social strategies to determine a word's meaning. Consolidation is committing the word to memory through note-taking, cognitive, memory strategies and using the word actively through activation strategies. Metacognition includes planning, monitoring and evaluating one's learning.
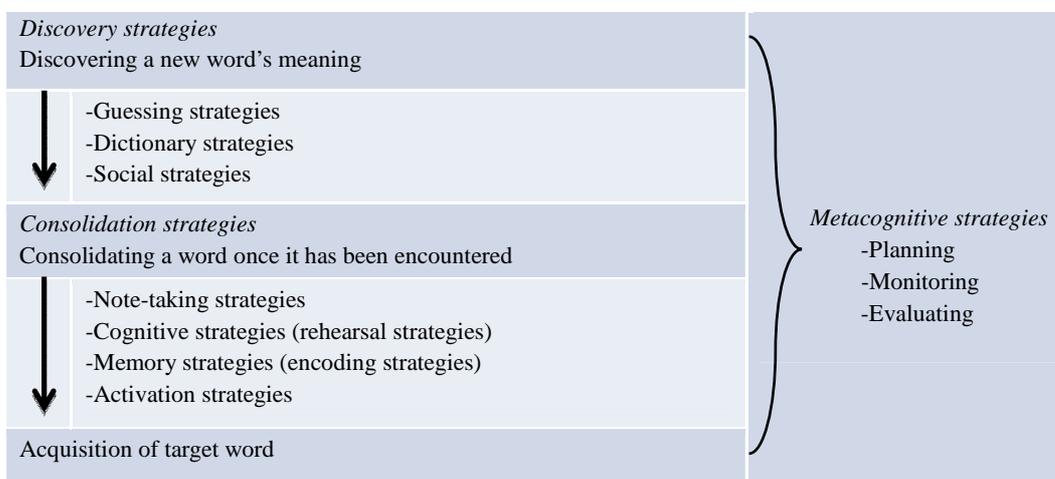

Discovery strategies
Discovering a new word's meaning

- Guessing strategies
- Dictionary strategies
- Social strategies

Consolidation strategies
Consolidating a word once it has been encountered

- Note-taking strategies
- Cognitive strategies (rehearsal strategies)
- Memory strategies (encoding strategies)
- Activation strategies

Acquisition of target word

Metacognitive strategies
- Planning
- Monitoring
- Evaluating

Figure 1. Classification of VLS (based on Schmitt (1997) and Gu and Johnson (1996).

Method

The coursebooks were selected based on the following criteria:

- Be commercially available in Japan
- Be recommended by the publisher for use in Japan
- Be recommended by a major bookstore for use by Japanese students
- Be general, four skills coursebooks
- Be aimed at young adults or adults

Three coursebooks were selected that fit these criteria, as presented in Table 1. The components used in this study are the students' book, teacher's book, workbook and supplemental materials for each series. While the workbooks and supplemental materials are often considered non-vital, they are included because they contain vocabulary sections and are meant to be used by students independently of the teacher and classroom, which has implications for the potential use of learning strategies.

TABLE 1
Coursebook Information

	Four Corners 3(4C)	*American Headway 3 (AH)*	*English Firsthand 2(EF)*
Authors	Liz Soars and John Soars	Jack Richards and David Bohlke	Marc Helgesen, Steven Brown and John Wiltshier
Publisher	Cambridge University Press	Oxford University Press	Pearson Longman Asia ELT
Date Published	2012	2016	2010
CEF level	B1	B1	B1
Supplemental materials	Class audio CDs, classware, DVD	Online skills program, class audio CD, iTools classroom presentation software	Audio CDs, teacher's CD-ROM

The analysis of VLS in coursebooks consisted of firstly determining the exact number and nature of VLS, and secondly of ascertaining the variety of VLS, the amount of practice opportunities included for VLS, and the amount and placement of independent study opportunities in reference materials. Accordingly, the coursebook materials were read thoroughly and each task that could constitute use or training of a VLS was tabulated. The VLS used in Schmitt (1997), Gu and Johnson (1996) and Tseng and Schmitt (2008) were used as references. In order to allow comparisons between the coursebooks, a five-point rating scheme was used to assess the coursebooks for each category. Table 2 shows the criteria used for each category, and the final scores for each coursebook can be found in the Appendix.

TABLE 2
Assessment Criteria (based on Sinclair & Ellis, 1992; Lake, 1997; Nation, 2001; Takač, 2008); and Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2009)

Criteria	Description
Scope of vocabulary learning strategies	Extent to which vocabulary learning strategies are included in the content of the unit
Variety	Range of VLS, including discovery, consolidation and metacognitive strategies
Practice opportunities	Extent of practice opportunities
Independent study opportunities in reference materials	Inclusion of additional materials for the students' reference, such as grammar notes, vocabulary lists, transcripts, and answers

Lastly, it must be noted that these coursebooks were analysed as they are and not as materials-in-action (i.e., as used in the classroom) (Littlejohn, 2011), and therefore assume no additional input from teachers.

Results

Extent of VLS

Table 3 shows the total different VLS in each coursebook organised by classification. VLS that are given five or more practice opportunities are marked by an asterisk *. The total number of VLS for each coursebook is indicated with the total number of VLS with five or more practice opportunities in brackets.

TABLE 3
VLS in the Coursebooks

Category	Strategy	4C	AH	EF
Discovery	Analyse part of speech		+	
	Analyse affixes and roots		+	
	Analyse pictures	+*	+	+*
	Guess meaning from textual context	+	+*	+
	Use dictionary (monolingual)	+		
	Use dictionary (bilingual)		+*	+
	Use glossary		+	
	Guess meaning from spoken context			+
	Discover new meaning through group activity		+*	
	Ask classmates for meaning		+	+
Consolidation	Study and practice meaning in groups	+*	+*	+*
	Study words with pictorial representations of their meaning	+	+	
	Connect words to personal experiences		+	
	Associate the word with its collocates	+*	+*	+
	Use semantic categories / semantic features grid	+*	+*	+
	Connect the word to its synonyms and antonyms	+	+*	+
	Focus on word form	+	+*	
	Focus on word meaning		+*	
	Paraphrase word's meaning		+	
	Learn the words of an idiom / set phrase together	+*	+*	
	Study the spelling / sound of words	+	+*	
	Focus on affixes and parts of speech	+	+*	
	Use silent repetition			+
	Use word cards		+	+
	Use word lists from coursebook		+*	+*
	Keep vocabulary notebook		+	
	Use International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)		+*	
	Use configuration		+	
	Continue to study word over time	+*	+*	+*
	Complete sentence with new word	+*	+*	+*
	Use newly learned words mentally in imaginary situations			+
	Name things mentally as you see them			+
Metacognitive	Awareness-raising activities		+	+
	Test oneself with word tests	+*		
	Skip over unknown words			+
	Planned review (distributed practice)			+
	Planned exposure to L2		+	+
	Interact with others in L2			+*
	Monitoring learning	+*		+*
Total		16 (9*)	30 (16*)	22 (7*)

As shown, *4C* includes 16 VLS, *AH* includes 30 VLS and *EF* includes 22 VLS. There is no one correct amount of VLS that coursebooks should include as different students will use different amounts of VLS. However, Gu and Johnson's (1996) study containing 91 strategies find that the most successful learners employ a wide range of VLS, which indicates 30 is a more appropriate number than 16. For that reason, *4C* receives a score of 1, *AH* receives a score of 3 and *EF* receives a score of 2 in this category.

Variety

The effectiveness of VLS use depends on variables such as the task, background knowledge, context of learning, target language, and learner characteristics (Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2009), and VLS use has been found to change depending on age (Schmitt, 1997); gender (Gu, 2002); cultural background (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990); and proficiency (Schmitt, 1997). Therefore, coursebooks should include a

variety of learner strategies, including metacognitive strategies, to facilitate the learner being able to understand and choose the VLS that appeal to them.

4C receives a score of 0 in this category as it does not include a large variety of VLS: three discovery strategies, eleven consolidation strategies, and two metacognitive strategies. The lack of discovery strategies and metacognitive strategies is a weak point.

AH receives a score of 2 as its materials include a decent variety of VLS: eight discovery strategies, twenty consolidation strategies, and two metacognitive strategies. Although metacognitive strategies such as awareness-raising are included, the lack of monitoring and reflecting, and evaluating strategies is a weak point.

EF scores 3 in this category as the materials include a good variety of VLS: five discovery strategies, eleven consolidation strategies, and six metacognitive strategies including, awareness-raising, monitoring, reflecting and evaluating activities. Although there are fewer strategies presented than in *AH*, the balance between discovery, consolidation and metacognitive is better.

Extent of VLS Practice Activities

Students need to have multiple, scaffolded and explicit practice opportunities in order to be able to use a strategy autonomously (Nation, 2011). Course materials can facilitate student autonomy by providing the many practice opportunities learners need to become confident autonomous users of a VLS.

4C receives a score of 2 in this category. There are nine VLS that *4C* provides more than five opportunities to practice with. However, as all of the VLSs are presented implicitly students may not be aware that they are practicing VLS and therefore not benefit as much from the repeated exposure. For example, *4C* encourages students to practice new vocabulary together in every unit of the student book however, without explicit instruction on the specific VLS they are using, this is a missed opportunity to train students on these strategies.

One area that *4C* excels at is the recycling of target vocabulary. Between all the materials (including unit tests, final tests and video worksheets), students receive between five and ten exposures to each target word.

AH receives a score of 2. There are 16 VLS that *AH* provides more than five opportunities to practice with, including guessing from context, analysing word form and roots, and recording collocations. However, as with *4C,* the lack of metacognitive strategies would prevent students from becoming more autonomous learners of these strategies.

EF receives a score of 1 as there are only seven VLS that *EF* provides more than five opportunities to practice with, and most are presented implicitly, such as monitoring. As with *4C*, without implicit instruction, students are unlikely to use these VLS autonomously.

Independent Study Opportunities in Reference Materials

Intermediate students should be encouraged to become responsible for their own learning and part of that means having access to the learning resources and reference materials generated by their coursebook (Sinclair & Ellis, 1992). If not, they remain dependent upon the teacher.

4C receives a score of 3 in this category. *4C*'s supplemental materials consist of student self-study CD-ROM and teacher CD-ROM. For students, the CD-ROM has extra practice for key vocabulary introduced in the student book as well as vocabulary tests. There is a monolingual dictionary with all new vocabulary from the students' book, with a place for students to type personal notes, as well as options for students to listen to the pronunciation of the word and to record themselves saying the word. The dictionary sorts words alphabetically, by unit or by category (for example, "clothing styles" or "compound adjectives"). There is also a "my progress" section that allows students to record their vocabulary activity scores. The students' book contains a reference list of adjectives with their corresponding adverbs. The teacher's book contains the answer key to the workbook, answers to the student book activities, the class audio and video

scripts, and video worksheets. The students' materials encourage independent study; however, the inclusion of the students' and workbook answers in the teacher's book means students remain dependent on their teachers.

AH receives a score of 1 in this category. Its supplemental materials consist of online resources for both the teacher and students. The student resources have limited vocabulary resources: there is partial access to an online dictionary; however, it is not graded for the intermediate level. There is also access to quizzes for each unit which test vocabulary from the student book. This is the first opportunity the course materials give for students to practice the new vocabulary from the student book as the workbook does not review it. The student book contains word lists for each unit, a phonetic symbols chart, and the audio scripts for each unit. However, *AH*'s teacher's book contains the answer key to both the workbook and student book activities, which limits the students' autonomy in their self-study.

EF receives a score of 2 in this category as it offers very few independent study options for students. The student book has vocabulary lists for each unit with extra related words and expressions, plus a CD with the course audio. The workbook has review activities for vocabulary from each unit. The online vocabulary resources consist of an online dictionary, which has not been graded for the intermediate level. The lack of student-accessible vocabulary learning resources is a weak point; however, the workbook contains its answer keys, and the students can check the answers to the student book's Language Check activities online, which is the reason *EF* receives a score of 2 instead of 1 in this category.

Discussion and Conclusion

It was found that the coursebooks sampled in this study all included VLS; however, they varied in the amount and variety of VLS they contained, and in the inclusion of practice opportunities and reference materials. However, this study analysed only three ELT coursebooks from hundreds of titles. Therefore, it is impossible to make a generalised statement about the inclusion of VLS in commercial ELT coursebooks in Japan based solely on this study. However, it is possible to conclude that VLS inclusion can vary greatly from book to book, and that there remain possibilities for improvement in all coursebooks. Further studies could widen the scope of materials as well as widen the investigation to include the level of instruction of VLS in coursebooks.

Given the amount of evidence that suggests VLS use is beneficial for students, and the amount of influence coursebooks have in the classroom, the conclusion that VLS inclusion varies among coursebooks indicates there is a need for materials writers to include more VLS training and practice in general ELT materials. Also teachers should be aware of the difference in VLS inclusion among coursebooks and should endeavour to choose a book that provides effective VLS instruction and practice.

The Author

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Appendix

Coursebook Scores

Criteria	*4C*	*AH*	*EF*
Scope of vocabulary learning strategies	1	3	2
Variety	0	2	3
Practice opportunities	2	2	1
Independent study opportunities in reference materials	3	1	2
Total	**6**	**8**	**8**